

*United States Marine Corps
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FUTURE WARFARE PAPER

TITLE:

A SOCIAL MOVEMENT THEORY ANALYSIS
OF ISLAMIST TOTALITARIANISM

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF OPERATIONAL STUDIES

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AY 07-08

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Date: _____

Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.					
1. REPORT DATE 2008		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-2008 to 00-00-2008	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE A Social Movement Theory Analysis of Islamist Tolitarianism				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) United States Marine Corps,Command and Staff College, School of Advanced Warfighting,Marine Corps University, 2076 South Street,Quantico ,VA,22134-5068				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT Same as Report (SAR)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 32	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

Executive Summary

Title: A Social Movement Theory Analysis of Islamist Totalitarianism

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Thesis: The Islamist totalitarian enemy is a complex, dynamic collective of various entities and organizations. Grouping them together under the “terrorist” label serves only to confuse strategy. Reform within Muslim states that opens their institutionalized political process is the best way to “win” the Long War. Where direct action is required, it must be carefully targeted, timed, and perceived as legitimate and legal.

Discussion: It is critical to gain an understanding of an enemy before formulating a strategy to defeat him. This is particularly crucial with regard to the diverse, non-monolithic enemy that faces the US today. Social Movement Theory (SMT) provides analytical tools for this purpose. The advantage of SMT is that its four variables – changes to political opportunity structures (POS), the nature of social networks, social movement organization (SMO) framing, and repertoires of contention – allow for analysis from the individual to the national and international levels. Moreover, SMT explanation of SMO strategic decisions takes into account rational choice, organizational culture, and political intercourse. These strengths make SMT analysis more complete than other theoretical models for contentious politics.

SMT analysis of terror organizations shows the decisive role that government action plays in determining whether a social movement will resolve the grievances that created it peacefully or violently. Specifically, coercive, general, reactive, and extra-legal government repression will, over time, drive the creation of terror groups – i.e., clandestine, extra-legal, violent organizations. Radical ideology, while important to the process, is not, by itself, sufficient to explain the emergence of terrorism. The critical insight is that Islamism (the mobilization of contentious politics in support of Islamic causes), in and of itself, is not necessarily a threat to the current world order.

An SMT analysis shows that the repressive policies of successive Egyptian and Syrian regimes, Marxist-Leninist revolutionary theory, and the intellectual social networks on Saudi university campuses created modern Islamist totalitarian terrorism. The same assessment explains how the experience of the Soviet-Afghan War shaped al-Qaeda and allied movement strategic thought. Finally, SMT clearly shows that not all individuals and groups that engage in violent repertoires in support of Islamic causes are the same – most pose little direct threat to the US.

Conclusions: SMT is useful as an orienting device in support of formulating strategy. SMT orientation strongly suggests that the primary strategic objective of the US and its allies should be reform within Muslim states that opens the institutionalized political system. In this manner, legitimate grievances can be resolved peacefully, Islamist totalitarian movement will lose strength, and the Democratic powers can “win” the Long War.

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I. Introduction

In part five of his famous “Long Telegram,” George Kennan made several observations about the Soviet Union from which he deduced the strategy that has come to be called “Containment.” Kennan’s most important conclusion was that:

Our first step must be to apprehend, and recognize for what it is, the nature of the movement with which we are dealing. We must study it with same courage, detachment, objectivity, and same determination not to be emotionally provoked or unseated by it, with which doctor studies unruly and unreasonable individual *[sic]*.¹

This essay will follow Kennan’s advice relative to the enemy that the United States and the Western World face today – Islamist totalitarians.² To that end, this paper will use social movement theory (SMT) for three purposes. First, it will describe SMT as means of understanding political contention. Second, it will use SMT to explain why some social movements become violent. Third, it will provide an SMT analysis of Islamist totalitarianism. From this analysis, this paper will draw three conclusions that should guide future strategic design in the Long War. First, our Islamist totalitarian enemy is a complex, dynamic collective of various entities and organizations – grouping them together under the “terrorist” label serves only to confuse our strategy. Second, reform within Muslim states that opens their institutionalized political process is the best way to “win” the so called Long War. Third, where direct action is required, it must be carefully targeted, timed, and perceived as legitimate and legal.

The analysis and conclusions of this essay contrast with the thinking that guides the US Government’s *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*. Although the *National Strategy* states that Islamist terror groups are not monolithic, its strategic direction makes no differentiation between transnational and national terror groups or between those that use terror

as a method and those for which terror is the logic.³ While the *National Strategy* acknowledges that populations that lack a political voice in addressing grievances provide fertile recruiting grounds for terror groups, it assumes that radical ideology (and not state repression of political attempts to mitigate legitimate grievances) is responsible for the emergence and persistence of violent political movements.⁴ Finally, although the *National Strategy* acknowledges the importance of radical Islamist ideology, it fails to properly define its philosophical base and identify its role in shaping extremist violence.⁵ The result of the above three flaws is that the *National Strategy* espouses “advancing effective democracy” as a conceptual, “long-term” goal instead of working with Muslim regimes to open their institutionalized political system as a means of peacefully mitigating legitimate grievances.⁶ Moreover, over half of the text of the *National Strategy* and all short-term actions are coercive, counter-terrorism measures.⁷ As this essay will demonstrate, this strategy requires modification.

II. Social Movement Theory

Social movement theory emerges as a reconciliation of two sociological theories for analyzing and describing contentious politics. The theories differ primarily in the size of social group they analyze and the importance they assign to individuals. “Structural theories tend to have large units of analysis, generally focusing on states and the international system to explain large episodes of collective action.”⁸ Changes in international and national systems explain war, peace, revolution, insurgency, and terrorism. Individuals represent national and international structures, but the structures and their interaction trump individual decisions. Structural analysis shares many characteristics with Graham Allison’s Rational Actor Model (or Model I thinking) applied at the state or international system level.⁹

By contrast, rational choice theory emphasizes the role and impact of the individual in contentious politics. “For such theorists, states, systems, and groups do not make choices; only individuals do, and modeling individual choices in strategic relationships with other individuals is the preferred analytical approach to understanding collective action, including revolutions.”¹⁰ Whereas structuralists see individuals as essentially subordinate parts of a larger collective that acts as a unified whole, rationalists believe that the whole is nothing more than a sum of individual actions. In rational choice theory, groups are only important to the extent that they allow individuals to overcome the “free rider” problem.¹¹ As the name implies, sociological rational choice is similar to Allison’s rational actor – the difference with structural theory is that the actors are individuals, not states.¹²

SMT emerges as an attempt to reconcile the structural and rational model analysis. First, history has shown that individuals do matter in political conflict. Second, political, economic, social, and cultural structure prescribes and limits individual choice. For example, structural factors caused the French Revolution and provided Napoleon Bonaparte with the opportunity to rise to power. However, the French Emperor’s personal blend of genius and weakness explains the course of events in late Eighteenth and early Nineteenth Century Europe in a manner that purely structural factors cannot. “While recognizing that individuals make strategic choices, social movement theorists contend that such choices are not made in a vacuum outside of the changing context within which people actually live.” However, “while structural changes outside of the control of any individual provide for changing opportunity structures,¹³ they do not dictate outcomes.”¹⁴ SMT assessment of social movements accounts for Allison’s Rational Actor, Organizational Behavior, and Governmental Politics models.¹⁵ As such, it is more

comprehensive than either the structural or rational choice models alone. Glenn E. Robinson graphically depicts the relationship between the three theories in figure 1 below.¹⁶

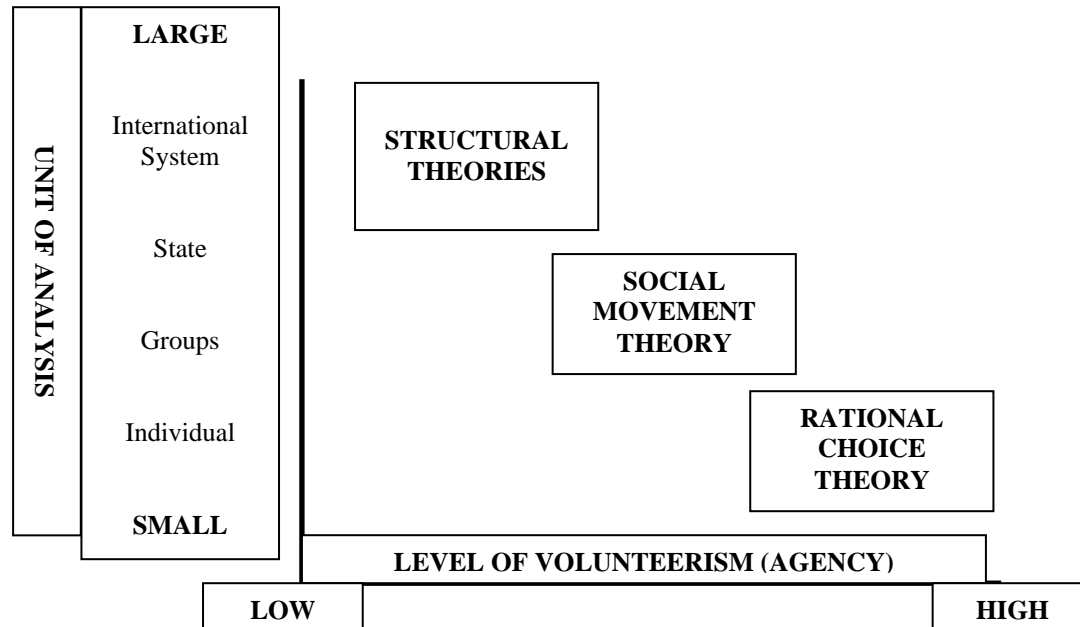


Figure 1. Comparative Analysis of Contentious Collective Action

Social movement theorists define transgressive contentious politics as “episodic, public, collective interaction among makers of claims and their objects when (a) at least one government is a claimant, an object of claims, or a party to the claims and (b) the claims would, if realized, affect the interests of at least one of the claimants.”¹⁷ They further add two factors to define contained contention: “(c) at least some parties to the conflict are newly self-identified political actors, and/or (d) at least some parties employ innovative collective action.”¹⁸ Islamic social movements can be seen as “contained” because they tend to include all four factors. Quintan Wiktorowicz argues that Islamic activism is “*the mobilization of contention to support Muslim causes*” (italics in the original).¹⁹

SMT describes social movements in terms of several variables. There is general consensus among social movement theorists on the importance of three factors: (1) changes in

the political opportunity structure; (2) the nature of available and/or created networks, organizations, and mobilizing structures; and (3) the social movement's use of frames and framing.²⁰ Wiktorowicz and Mohammed M. Hafez assert that political opportunity structure (POS) can be thought of as the combination of several factors including the "availability of allies . . . the nature of state repression . . . the instability of elite alignments . . . and the institutional strength of the state."²¹ To be useful, definitions of what does and does not constitute a POS factor must be carefully focused. An overly broad definition runs the risk of including everything and, therefore, explaining nothing.²²

Diane Singerman argues that the movement of people and groups of people from one category of organizations or social networks (formal, informal, legal, illegal, extralegal, etc.) to another builds social movements. She follows Charles Tilly in suggesting that the product of sets of individuals from multiple networks and the size and scope of those networks defines organization.²³ Social movement organization (SMO) use of networks alters those networks, creates new ones, and has the potential to change the SMO itself.²⁴

Framing, according to Wiktorowicz, includes (a) diagnosing a condition or set of conditions as a problem in need of resolution to include assigning blame for the deleterious state of events; (b) providing solutions (to including strategy and tactics) and the SMO as the embodiment of the solution set; and (c) offering a compelling rationale for collective action.²⁵ Framing can be seen as a micro-organizational mobilization tool. Frames can either follow the rational actor or motivational model. Rational framing offers selected, targeted incentives as a benefit to a prospective recruit if he or she joins. Motivational framing issues a call to action based upon the moral outrage or deeply held beliefs of the targeted individual. A frame's success is not entirely based on its

intrinsic appeal. Rather, it hinged on a set of conditions external to the message itself, including (1) its close “fit” with the life experiences and beliefs of those [people or groups of people] targeted for recruitment; (2) the credibility and effectiveness of its agents and modes of transmission; and (3) its reinforcement through intensive, small-group solidarity at the grassroots level.²⁶

Tilly addresses another variable – a social movement’s repertoire of contentious action.²⁷

In SMT, repertoires are combinations of contentious political action that an SMO is able and willing to employ. In some respects, contentious repertoires are the strategy, operational art, and tactics of a social movement. While Tilly argues that only groups have repertoires, Fred H. Lawson contends that individuals can also exhibit repertoire behavior.²⁸

Rodney Stark argues that social movements occur “[w]hen people organize to cause or prevent social change.”²⁹ Stark’s definition implies two factors. First, there is something that has led people to want change or desire to prevent it. This is the grievance. Second, there is someone or something preventing or driving change. This something or someone will, on some level, resist the social movement. To the extent that this resistance occurs, an adversarial political, social, cultural, economic, or military relationship is likely to emerge.

As is the case with most social movement theorists, Stark organizes the variables that describe social movements into structural and rational choice analytical systems. The first, collective behavior, “emphasizes social movements as outbursts of group activity in response to deeply felt grievances.”³⁰ Individual and group rational decision-making is deemphasized in favor of cultural-emotional responses. The second, resource mobilization, minimizes grievances and stresses rational choice, organization, and power within a society. The basis of dismissing grievances as a key cause is the assumption that there exists enough discontent within almost any society that, if properly mobilized, will lead to a social movement.³¹ Taken together, the two

analytical structures indicate two sets of four factors that explain why social movements occur and what is required for social movements to succeed:

For a social movement to *occur*:

1. Some members of the society must share a *grievance* which they want to correct, either by changing society or by preventing a change they oppose.
2. These people must have *hope* – they must think there is some possibility of success.
3. Often, but not always, a *precipitating event* will ignite pent-up grievances and convince people that the time for action has arrived.
4. People are recruited by social movements through networks of attachment... Not only are *individuals* recruited through their network ties, social movements often *originate within a network*... Moreover, once a movement is underway, sometimes whole networks, including those constituting formal organizations, will join at one time.

For a social movement to *succeed*:

1. It must achieve an effective *mobilization of people and resources*. That is, a social movement will tend to be more successful to the degree that it enjoys effective leadership, attracts committed and disciplined members, and is able to secure the necessary finances and facilities. These are classified as *internal* factors influencing a social movement.
2. It must withstand or overcome *external* opposition.
3. The fate of the social movement also depends on enlisting *external allies* from other major groups and powerful institutions in the society – or at least it must be able to keep them neutral.
4. Whenever social movements arise in response to a grievance that is widely shared, and when substantial resources are available, the movement will tend to be embodied in a number of *separate organizations*. These social movement organizations may cooperate, but often they compete rather vigorously.³²

In Summary, SMT offers an explanatory model for why social movements occur and why some of those that occur succeed while others fail. The model is generally more comprehensive than other socio-political models because it bridges the gap from the individual to the very large organization level. Moreover, SMT explains SMO decision-making (as a whole, as a group of

organizations, and as a collective of individuals) across each of Allison three models. Further, in its reciprocal linkage of variables to movements, SMT provides some value in predicting when and under what conditions social movements may arise.

Social movement theory has generally studied Western society, culture, and organizations. However, SMT's synthetic approach suggests that it can be applied to non-Western movements. Even a cursory glance at the above discussion shows that, other than in the necessity for cultural and experiential relevance of framing, SMT implicitly and explicitly rejects social movements of a particular type as being inherently tied to one culture over another.³³ Nowhere is this truer than in explaining why certain SMOs become violent while others do not.

III. The Donatella della Porta Model

The political opportunity structure variable – specifically in the aspects of “accessibility of the institutionalized political system and the nature of state repression”³⁴ – offers both explanatory and (potentially) predictive value in determining why certain SMOs become violent. Donatella della Porta's study, “Left-Wing Terrorism in Italy,” used the above two POS sub-factors to show that there was nothing inherently Italian in the labor protests of the 1960s and 1970s turning violent and giving birth to terrorist organizations. As with other aspects of SMT, della Porta's model, with minor modifications, transfers to the problem of Islamist terrorism.

As in any SMT analysis, della Porta seeks to explain terrorist violence inclusively from the individual through the societal level. To this end, she characterizes terrorist groups as “special forms of political organizations. Terrorism is defined as the activity of those clandestine³⁵ organizations that, by a continued and almost exclusive use of illegal forms of action, aim to attain their political goals through profound transformations of state institutions.”³⁶ Della Porta then uses POS to trace the reasons for the birth of terrorist

organizations, analyzes organizational networks both as links to resources and drivers of violent repertoires, and identifies individual motivation in terms of framing. She finishes by synthesizing each level of analysis to build a model that explains and predicts which SMOs are likely to turn violent.

A key insight of SMT is that few, if any, SMOs are congenitally violent. Political, social, cultural, and economic grievances tend to be a point of departure. Violent repertoires are emergent or learned behaviors that result from changes in the POS. In the Italian case, della Porta identifies the political density of SMOs fighting to control the power inherent in large scale popular discontent, the persistence of the protest cycle, and the government's adoption of extra-legal repressive measures as the POS changes that drove the logic of violence. The government's refusal to mitigate grievances combined with laws specifically designed to limit the protestors' legal representatives from achieving electoral gains served to close the institutionalized political system and extend the protest cycle. The large number of SMOs relative to the population drove some groups to adopt increasingly radical repertoires to differentiate themselves. Finally, the government's reactive, repression-only counter-protest strategy – to include the use of violent, pro-government militia – “taught” radicals the organizational skills and violent repertoires of terrorism.³⁷

Della Porta argues that, once violent repertoires entered the normal range of political contention, government and SMO strategic choices determined the nature, persistence, and level of unrest. Legitimate political parties that had been excluded from institutionalized politics and exposed to some level of government repression produced ideological radicals. Radical ideologies, however, were not sufficient, in and of themselves, to explain terrorism because only a very small minority of radicals turned to terrorism. Instead, such beliefs “operate as facilitating

factors, resources or constraints, in the formation of actors and definition of strategies... Ideologies are also rationalizations for decisions to escalate violence.”³⁸ Put another way, ideology shaped strategic choice. Where the emergence of militants led to increased government repression, a self-sustaining cycle of violence appeared. As a defensive measure to survive this environment, legitimate parties create compartmentalized, extra-legal structures to hide their association with and protect their more radical, violent elements. The strategic choice of underground groups to adopt defensive clandestinity (generally in response to government action) signaled the birth of terrorist organizations.³⁹ The movement from the emergence of political violence to the emergence of terrorism is, therefore, explained both in terms of POS and the logic of a networked organization under internal and external pressure – not as an inherent result of a particular ideology.

According to della Porta, terrorist group structure and strategy can be explained as a reaction to the political environment, a result of the need to procure resources, and in terms of the imperative of strategic communications. Militant groups that existed within environments that supported terrorism tended to adopt more “decentralized, open, and flexible” organizations. Those that existed in environments where violence was limited and the population was inhospitable tended to become “rigidly compartmentalized.” The first structure is better for recruitment and resource mobilization. Moreover, sub-groups can follow general political guidance without detailed operational direction increasing the reach of the terror group. Of course, the decentralized organization is vulnerable to penetration and destruction. The second structure is less effective in recruiting and resource mobilization but is much more secure.⁴⁰

The strategic choices of violence, extra-legality, and clandestinity create a dilemma for terrorist groups. Attacks that tend to attract the best recruits risk alienating the masses whom the

terrorist group purports to lead and intends to mobilize.⁴¹ Terrorist organizations attempt to reconcile the competing demands of recruitment and popular support through framing their actions – they diagnose the problem facing the population as the work of an exogenous oppressor, articulate violent revolution as the only answer, and call the victimized population to arms. As the conflict proceeds, government repression and terror group defensive clandestinity drives its membership further from the society on whose behalf they claim to fight. The level of violence and nature of ideology alters to represent the internal logic of continuing the struggle and maintaining solidarity. The potential exists that a militant group may travel so far down the path of terror as a strategy that its initial objectives are unrecognizable and its link to its base is completely severed.⁴² The progression from terror as a method to terror as logic is thus a function of POS, network-organization, and framing.

Della Porta discusses the impact of formal and informal social networks on the existence, survivability, and longevity of terrorist groups. Socio-economic background, political activism, and ideological outlook were, by themselves, insufficient to explain an individual's decision to join and remain in a terrorist group. Social networks were the most important factor for politically radical activists to become involved in extra-legal, clandestine, armed militancy. Further, networked groups created cohesion, maintained secrecy, excluded moderation, and instilled discipline. The terrorist social networks also developed collective identity and solved “free rider” problems among the membership. The above factors created an entirely new value system that strengthened the terrorist logic and minimized defection.⁴³ As noted in the earlier discussion of SMT, terrorist use of networks altered those networks, created new organizations, and changed the nature of the militant movement.

A visual representation of della Porta's model is useful in that it provides insight into where the progression from grievance to militancy can be mitigated, redirected or interrupted.⁴⁴

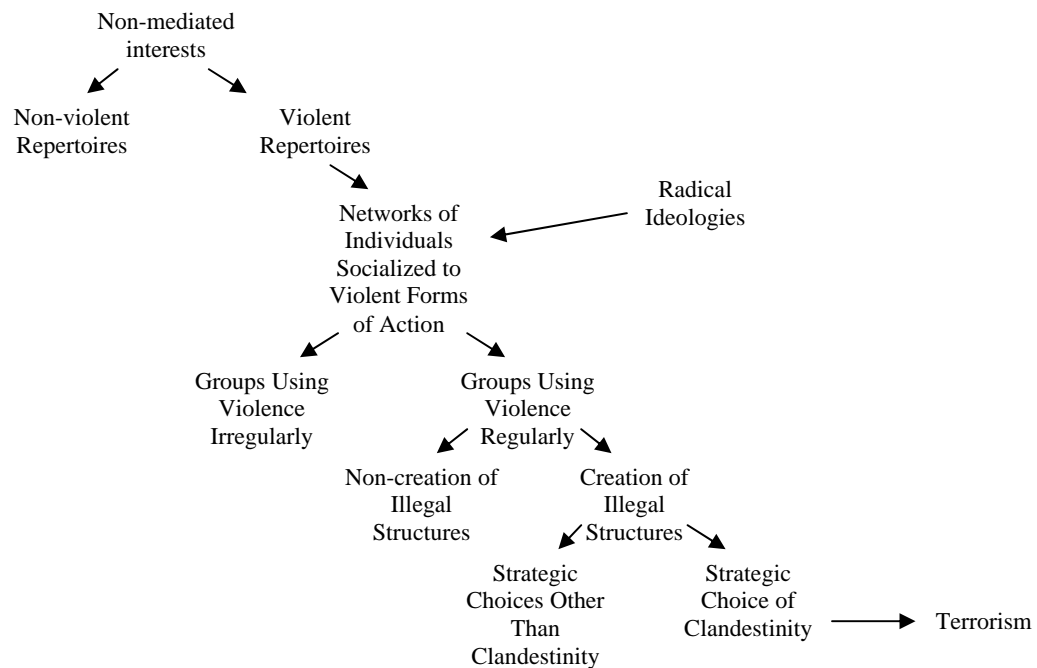


Figure 2. A model for the emergence of clandestine organizations

In conclusion, della Porta convincingly shows that terrorism specifically, and political violence in general, is not the result of irrational or congenitally violent people, groups, or cultures. As can be inferred from figure 2, by far the most effective means to avert political violence is to mediate conflicting interests. If mediation is, for whatever reason, impossible or impractical, some level of violence is likely. Further, although radical ideology frames strategic decisions, it does not, by itself, lead to terror. Violence, extra-legal organization, clandestinity, and terrorism can be explained as strategic, operational, and tactical choices of SMOs. Moreover, it can be seen that government repression plays a decisive role in each step along the progression to violent militancy. Finally, della Porta's model is a function of the SMT variables – changes in POS (particularly the nature of state response to SMOs), the nature of organizational networks, conflict framing, and changes to repertoires of contention.

IV. A Model for Government Counteraction

Della Porta's model requires some modification to make it transferable to non-Italian Left Wing conflict. For example, in his discussion of Shi'i violence in mid-1990s Bahrain, Lawson argues that, although della Porta's model offers a "promising way to explain changes" in repertoires of contention, empirical tests have failed to convincingly confirm or refute her theory.⁴⁵ He contends that her model of terrorist violence rising towards the end of each protest cycle (just as mass mobilization dies down, terror groups complete their journey towards clandestinity, isolation, and violence as a logic) does not hold true in several cases. He specifically cites Bahrain, the former Soviet Union between 1989 and 1991, and the Federal Republic of Germany and the Netherlands in the 1970s and 80s. In Bahrain, Lawson notes that the most extreme violence occurred early in the protest cycle. This peak was followed by two lesser increases in confrontation with the Khalifa government.⁴⁶

Della Porta views government counteraction one-dimensionally. For her, government reaction is either more or less coercive. The more violent the response, the more the government loses its monopoly on use of force, undermines its legitimacy, and justifies the SMO's violent repertoires.⁴⁷ This view, which informs discussions of "soft" versus "hard" power in dealing with terrorism and insurgency, is insufficient to explain the nature and timing of violence.

Three additional dimensions of government response must be examined to complete della Porta's model. Lawson and Hafez and Wiktorowicz suggest that the first should be precision.⁴⁸ Hafez and Wiktorowicz argue that the second is timing.⁴⁹ I suggest that the third additional dimension should be legality. Precision of response ranges from general and indiscriminate to specific and targeted. General or indiscriminate government response tends to exacerbate tensions within the larger population, de-legitimize the government, and support the logic of

wide-spread violence. Precisely focused responses, even those that are coercive, tend to isolate their targets from the greater population because the latter are largely left to live their lives in peace and security. This appears to be true even if the grievances that drove the formation of the social movement remain unresolved. Timing ranges from pre-emptive to reactive. Reactive response, particularly when it is indiscriminate, will tend to increase violence. Pre-emptive targeting, especially when it is carefully directed, will prevent violence.⁵⁰ Finally, legality ranges from legal to extra-legal. Famously articulated by Sir Robert Thompson as the small price the government must pay to be the government, legal responses tend to undermine the legitimacy of terrorism while extra-legal actions tend to support militant framing of the government as un-reformable. Hafez and Wiktorowicz assert that extra-legal coercion undermines the public perception of government response and drives “defensive” SMO violence escalation.⁵¹

To summarize, the four dimensions of government response explain the timing, extent, nature, and duration of political violence. For example, in Lawson’s analysis of Bahrain in the mid-1990s, the Khalifa regime’s reactive, general, coercive, and extra-legal initial response drove an early explosion of violence. As the Bahraini state reformed its response (and itself) the level of violence dropped in spite of many factors of political dissatisfaction remaining unresolved. In 1970s Italy, the government was able to target response during the first protest cycle. Much of the response remained reactive, coercive, and, in some cases extra-legal. This response had the effect of separating the militants from the general movement, forced them underground, and drove the spike in violence even as the protest cycle was coming to an end.

V. Applying SMT to Global Islamist Totalitarians

As cited in section II, Wiktorowicz defines Islamic activism as the mobilization of contention in support of Muslim causes. If the assertion that “democracy is a system whose policies are the result of conflict [*sic*]”⁵² is true, it becomes clear that Islamism, in and of itself, is not incompatible with the Western system of government. Islamist totalitarianism – an extremist offshoot of the larger Islamic activist social movement – does however pose an existential threat to the current world order.⁵³ An SMT assessment of a primary source perspective of Islamist militancy will show the decisive role of repression to the existence and persistence of terrorism, illuminate the disjointed nature of the movement, and clarify Muslim state government reform as critical to “winning” the Long War.

Abu Musab al-Suri – the source cited – is a former member of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. He became radicalized as a result of his experiences during the Assad regime’s suppression of the Islamist revolt during the 1980s. He fled Syria for Peshawar, Pakistan, fought in the Soviet-Afghan War, was a leading figure in the Algerian Armed Islamic Group’s (GIA) terror campaign in the early 1990s, operated a training camp in Afghanistan, swore fealty to the Taliban regime, and was an associate of Abdullah Azzam, Osama bin Laden, and Ayman al-Zawahiri. His 1,600-page treatise, *The Call to Global Islamic Resistance*, covers the history, philosophy, ideology, politics, strategy, operational art, and tactics of modern Islamic terror.⁵⁴ Although it is clear that al-Suri is not objective, his insider’s observations provide valuable insight into Islamic totalitarianism as a social movement.

Al-Suri defines his movement as the “Jihadi Stream.”

It comprises organizations, groups, assemblies, scholars, intellectuals, figures, and the individuals who adopted the ideology of Armed Jihad against the existing regimes in the Arabs lands and the Islamic world. These regimes are apostates because they rule by not what Allah said, and they legislate without Allah and give their loyalty and assistance to the Infidels. They also adopted the Jihadi Armed Method against the

colonialist's forces that attacked our Muslim lands by considering those regimes as allies fighting Islam and Muslims.⁵⁵

This description clearly supports Stark's assertion that any social movement is comprised of multiple organizations and entities. Al-Suri asserts that the Jihadi Stream is different from other groups within what he calls the "Armed Jihad Phenomenon." The difference is primarily based on objectives and orientation. A Jihadi Stream group is at war with any and all regimes in Muslim lands that are not strictly Islamist, and with any international, state, or non-state actor that supports such regimes. Al-Qaeda is a prototypical Jihadi Stream organization. Al-Suri's second category, a Mujahid Group, acts within or upon a single state, nation, or region. Such an organization generally has national liberation as its goal. Shamil Basayev's Chechen fighters were part of this category. Al-Suri's final group is a remnant of a defunct larger group that carries out armed acts on a personal level (e.g., attacking establishments that serve alcohol in a Muslim country).⁵⁶ Although each of these groups share violent repertoires of contention, use networks to mobilize resources, and frame conflict using similar language, changes in POS affect each differently. Governments must first understand the type of organization with which they are dealing before determining response strategy.

Al-Suri further subdivides Islamist groups into two categories and, within those, five sub-categories. This differentiation is concerned with whether a group follows a particular political-religious doctrine, is organized under a specific leader, or is a collection of un-aligned "militants."⁵⁷ A militant may be part of large network, adhere to a specific ideology, and execute according to a well-developed strategy. On the other hand, he may be an isolated radical seeking to do violence in the name of Islam. Both individuals are part of the same social movement and may be networked with similar groups – but this does not make them the same. A government's response strategy must sufficiently flexible to deal with either situation.

Al-Suri traces the origins of Islamist totalitarianism to Hassan al-Banna and the founding of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1930s. The movement formed as a result of the change in POS created by the transition from direct British colonial rule in Egypt to an indigenous regime. King Faruq failed to create sufficient access to the political system to mediate the Islamists' (and other groups') political interests. The result was revolution. Although the Muslim Brothers initially supported Abd al-Nasser, they became targets of brutal repression once the latter took power in the 1950s. A similar fate awaited the Brotherhood at the hands of the Syrian Ba'athists in the 1960s. While the Muslim Brotherhood had formed a clandestine organization as a self-defense measure during the Faruq regime, the violent repertoires that we associate with Islamist terrorism were born in the Egyptian and Syrian repressions.⁵⁸

Della Porta points out that ideology is critical at this point in the progression from grievance to terrorism. Such is the case in al-Suri's history of the Jihadi Stream. The ideology in this case was that of Abu 'Ala Maududi and Sayyid Qutb. Al-Suri argues that the principal contribution of these two thinkers was to raise Muslim consciousness, articulate the purpose of the struggle, and identify the ultimate goal. Their much more decisive influence was to inject Marxist-Leninist revolutionary theory into political Islam.⁵⁹ In response to Qutb, Hassan al Hadhibi wrote *Callers not Judges*. The latter's book rejects Qutb's assertion that the Islamist movement sit in violent judgment over non-Islamic regimes. According to al Hadhibi, the Muslim Brotherhood was to call the people to reject secularism, join Islamist groups, and vote for Islamist parties – not to lead a violent overthrow of the state. The two positions, which al-Suri calls the political and jihadi schools, represent the key schism within the Islamist movement.⁶⁰

To advance and protect the jihadi school, several of Qutb's followers within the Muslim Brotherhood created underground, extra-legal organizations. Continued Egyptian government repression – which tended toward the violence causing range of each of the four dimensions described in section IV – created Stark's precipitating event, helped spread the combined Islamist-Marxist-Leninist doctrine, and caused ideological fissures within the movement. Al-Suri relates that Qutb's execution increased his fame to the point that his work has been translated into every language that Muslims speak. Marwan Hadid came into contact with Qutbism during his studies in Egypt and imported the revolutionary theory and practice into Syria. Within the Egyptian prison system, the *Takfiri* (those that advocate expelling “apostate” Muslims from Islam) splinter group grew out of the larger jihadi movement. As predicted in della Porta's model, radical ideology institutionalized violence as the primary contentious repertoire and the creation of illegal structures drove Qutbists closer to terrorism.⁶¹

Egyptian and Syrian Islam, and, as a result the revolutionary doctrine that metastasized within those states, is not of the puritanical brand (Wahabi and Salafi) that is today associated with Islamist totalitarians. Al-Suri asserts that fundamentalist Islam and Qutbism became linked in Saudi Arabia. Newly flush with oil wealth in the 1960s and 1970s, the al-Saud regime began a deliberate program of building colleges and universities. Because Saudi Arabia did not have sufficient indigenous faculty to staff its burgeoning classrooms, the state imported teachers from the two most technologically advanced Arab countries – Egypt and Syria. Many of the instructors that came were those that had come into contact with the Muslim Brotherhood's Qutbist offshoot. Seeking to escape the general repression within their home countries, these teachers brought revolutionary Islam to Saudi Arabia.⁶²

SMT network thinking shows that the Wahabist-Salafist brand of revolutionary Islam is not a backward, tribal philosophy. It is a construct created on Saudi university campuses. Its creators were Egyptian and Syrian professors, Saudi theologians, and college students from across the Arabic-speaking world. Its propagation was the result of those students graduating, returning to their home countries, and proselytizing within their family, neighborhood, mosque, work, and college communities. Moreover, these theories are not exclusively Islamic – the violent revolutionary doctrine is Marxist-Leninist and, therefore, Western. Al-Suri asserts that this process of political-ideological development of the Jihadi Stream continued between 1960 and 1990. What emerged is a political-military-religious doctrine at odds with the majority of Muslim activist focus on the democratic process and government reform. Al-Suri depicts the networked process of ideological development as follows:

Basis from Muslim Brotherhood + the movement program for martyr Sayid Qutub [*sic*] + the Legitimate Political Doctrine for Imam Ibn Taymiyah and Al-Salafiya school + the Traditional Doctrine Laws for Al-Wahabiya Calling = the Legitimate Political Movement Program for the Jihadi Stream.⁶³

The crucial period in Al-Suri's history of international Islamist totalitarianism is the Soviet-Afghan War (Stark's precipitating event) and the post-war chaos in Afghanistan. During this period, changes in national and international POS brought several thousand Islamists (not all of the Jihadi Stream) together in Peshawar Pakistan. The most important structural change was the unlikely alliance between the Islamists, the Saudi monarchy, the Pakistani government, and the United States that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had created. Al-Suri describes an environment in which networks (including al-Qaeda) were built; revolutionary-Islamist intellectual frames were strengthened; and new repertoires (particularly those important to clandestine, violent organizations) were developed. Home government repression directed

against the “Afghan Arabs” and their illegal networks during the 1990s drove many to make the strategic choice of clandestinity, flee to the protection of the Taliban regime, or both.

Furthermore, “Afghan Arab” militants fled to Europe and to Asian majority Muslim nations spreading their ideology, exploiting existing networks, and constructing new ones. Within the Afghan-Taliban Islamic state, the internationally focused Jihadi Stream groups were dominant. Among those organizations, Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda was the leading group. The progression from unmitigated grievance to international terror organization was complete.⁶⁴

As noted in section IV, Della Porta concludes her discussion with the observation that, as the clandestinity of militant organizations drives them away from the population that they purport to represent, internal organizational framing creates a terrorist logic entirely separate from the larger social movement. The same dynamic took place in 1990s Afghanistan. Al-Suri asserts that, during this time, a general consensus emerged among the militant groups. Observing the fall of Soviet satellite states after the collapse of the USSR, bin Laden (among others) constructed a syllogism that continues to drive Islamist totalitarian doctrine today: satellite state governments will fall once their guiding great power sponsor ceases to exist. The Muslim World’s “non-Islamic” (that is to say all of them) states are American satellites. Therefore, the Islamic revolution can only occur if the US is destroyed as a great power.⁶⁵ This logical frame is unique to international Islamist totalitarians, places organizations like al-Qaeda at odds with national terror groups like Hamas, and is manifestly internal to the Jihadi Stream.⁶⁶

VI. Conclusion

This essay began with a reference to the intellectual foundation of the strategy that eventually defeated the seemingly insurmountable Soviet foe. Much of what actually worked during the Cold War was based on Kennan’s thinking. None of his concluding observations are

explicitly military. Instead, he recommends understanding the enemy better and limiting the spread of Communism by inoculating target populations.⁶⁷ Kennan's Long Telegram is, essentially, an SMT analysis of Stalinist Russia. It should, therefore, not be surprising that the conclusions that result from an SMT analysis of Islamic totalitarianism are similarly more focused on understanding and inoculating and less on kinetic actions.

Al-Suri's taxonomy of Islamic militancy and his emphasis on ideological differentiation mirror Stark's theoretical assertions. All Islamic political violence does not have the same ideology, causes, goals, strategies, and, therefore, solutions. Grouping organizations like al-Qaeda, Hamas, and Lebanese Hezbollah under the "terrorist" label risks confusing the issue. Each organization requires a separate approach. Generalized response strategies – such as the one that the *National Strategy* articulates – are almost by definition reactive and non-targeted and, therefore, risk increased terror.

Government reform in response to terrorism or insurgency is hardly a new idea. Hala Mustafa persuasively argues that it is the *sine qua non* of resolving the continuing contentious environment in the Arab World and is the best method to limit the political power of Islamism.⁶⁸ The della Porta model provides theoretical support to such assertions. The goal of United States policy cannot be to resolve the internal political conflict within Muslim states that has led to the formation of clandestine, illegal, militant groups – that would be impossible at best and counter-productive at worst. "Effective democracy," as articulated in the *National Strategy* risks doing precisely this. The goal of the US should be to work with our allies to open the institutionalized political system within Muslim countries and to make that system legitimate and effective.⁶⁹ Reform of this type would prevent the formation of new violent groups while draining support

and legitimacy from those that remain. It would also undermine the fundamental logic of al-Qaeda's strategic syllogism.

Given the fact that we cannot undo history and prevent Islamist totalitarian groups from forming, some amount of military action will be required to secure the US interests and to support political reform within Muslim states. If it is to be effective, American military action must be judged against the four dimensions of response. Non-coercive military action (e.g. foreign internal defense) is not always possible. Where force must be used, it must be targeted as precisely as possible at only those individuals, organizations, or states that pose a threat. Untargeted response does not effectively employ the military instrument and undermines American legitimacy. Pre-emptive action (e.g. so called "Phase Zero" operations) is always best. If the US is forced to react militarily, that reaction must be targeted correctly and employ only as much force as is necessary. Finally, international and domestic legitimacy is critical to preventing Islamist totalitarian strategic communications from turning our military victories into political defeat. While the *National Strategy* outlines the legal framework to hold other states accountable, it does not discuss doing the same for ourselves. Eschewing extra-legal means is a small price to pay for the United States to be the United States.

In closing, SMT provides a series of analytical tools. These tools can explain the nature of current Islamist movements, assist with predicting which movements may become violent, and shape strategic and operational design in combating international terrorism. As Tilly argues, SMT is an orienting device.⁷⁰ It cannot fully describe every aspect of political conflict.⁷¹ It does provide a useful, complementary lens for thinking about the nature of potential threats.

Notes

¹ George Kennan, 861.00/2 – 2246: *Telegram* (“Long Telegram”), <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/coldwar/documents/episode-1/kennan.htm>, (21 October 2007).

² The term commonly used to describe the military elements of the Islamist totalitarian revolutionaries is *Mujahideen* or *Jihadi*. This paper follows the contention of Dr. Douglas Streussand (among others) that this is counterproductive. *Jihad fi sabi’illah* (the struggle in the path of God) is one of the pillars of Islam that every devout Muslim is expected to follow. A *mujahid* is a Muslim that struggles righteously in the name and by the will of God. The enemy that we face is fighting to establish a repressive, totalitarian state – this cannot be the will of God. Further, referring to the enemy as righteous seems to imply that his cause is correct and ours is wrong – clearly, not the case. Finally, devout Muslims will naturally be drawn to someone that is generally recognized to be fighting for God – something that we do not want.

³ US National Security Council, *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism* (Washington: US Government Printing Office, 2006), 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 7, 9, and 12.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 9 – 11.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 7, 11 – 21.

⁸ Glenn E. Robinson, “ Hamas as a Social Movement,” in Quintan Wiktorowicz, ed., *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 113.

⁹ Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (New York: Addison-Wesley Longman, 1999), 13 – 48.

¹⁰ Robinson, 114.

¹¹ *Ibid.* The “free rider” problem is an economics concept that attempts to deal with the issue of an individual or group of individuals that refuses to pay, contribute, and/or sacrifice their fair share for a particular result for which the larger group is striving. Free riders want the result but have made the deliberate calculation that the larger collective wants it to such an extent that the marginal lack of contribution will not be missed or will not be worth the effort to extract from recalcitrant members.

¹² Allison and Zelikow, 13 – 48.

¹³ Opportunity structures are external factors or systems of factors that influence, direct, limit, and otherwise act upon an individual or group of individuals. For example, *sociology.org* defines opportunity structures as “a framework of rules people are encouraged to follow in order to achieve what their culture considers to be success (which can, of course, take different forms in different cultures).” Opportunity structure, *sociology.com*, <http://www.sociology.org.uk/p2d5n2c1.htm>, (4 February 2008). *Sociology Index* argues that “opportunity structure refers to the notion that opportunity, the chance to gain certain rewards or goals, is shaped by the way the society or an institution is organized (or structured).” Opportunity structure, *sociologyindex.com*, http://sociologyindex.com/opportunity_structure.htm, (4 February 2008).

¹⁴ Robinson 115.

¹⁵ Allison and Zelikow, 13 – 48, 143 – 97, and 255 – 94.

¹⁶ Robinson 114.

¹⁷ Ralf Dahrendorff defines interest as “a structurally generated orientation held by the incumbents of a defined position.” Ralf Dahrendorff referred to in Robert C. Angell, “The Sociology of Human Conflict,” in Elton B. McNeil, ed., *The Nature of Human Conflict* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1965), 104.

¹⁸ Doug McAdam, Sidney G. Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, quoted in Diane Singerman, “The Networked World of Islamist Social Movements,” in Quintan Wiktorowicz, ed., *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 149 – 50.

¹⁹ Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Introduction,” in Quintan Wiktorowicz ed., *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 2.

²⁰ See, for example, Wiktorowicz, 1 – 3; Robinson, 116; Tarrow referred to in Singerman, 154; Rodney Stark, *Sociology, 4th Edition* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1992), 613 – 14; Donatella della Porta, “Left-Wing Terrorism in Italy,” in Martha Crenshaw, ed., *Terrorism in Context* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press,

1995), 107 – 8; and Timothy D. Haugh, *Losing the Population: The Impact of Coalition Policy and Tactics on the Population and the Iraqi Insurgency* (Monterey: Naval Postgraduate School, 2005), 65.

²¹ Mohammed M. Hafez and Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Violence as Contention in the Egyptian Islamic Movement,” *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach*, in Quintan Wiktorowicz, ed., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 65. Hafez and Wiktorowicz refer to William Gamson, J. Craig Jenkins, Charles Perrow, Charles Tilly, Charles D. Brockett, Christian Smith, Sidney Tarrow, and Hanspeter Kriesi in formulating their definition of political opportunity structure.

²² Robinson, 123, follows William Gamson and David Meyer in cautioning against an overly inclusive view of political opportunity structures.

²³ Singerman, 154.

²⁴ Janine A. Clark, “Islamist Women in Yemen,” in Quintan Wiktorowicz, ed., *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 166.

²⁵ Wiktorowicz, 16.

²⁶ Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, “Interests, Ideas, and Islamist Outreach in Egypt,” in Quintan Wiktorowicz, ed., *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 231 – 2.

²⁷ Fred H. Lawson, “Repertoires of Contention in Contemporary Bahrain,” in Quintan Wiktorowicz, ed., *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 94 – 5; and Wiktorowicz, 1 – 3.

²⁸ Lawson, 95.

²⁹ Stark, 612.

³⁰ Ibid., 613.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid., 613 – 14.

³³ Moreover, other than Stark, each of the sources cited are explicitly applying SMT to Muslim SMOs.

³⁴ Hafez and Wiktorowicz, 66.

³⁵ Standard definitions tend to equate clandestinity with secrecy (e.g. “characterized by, done in, or executed with secrecy or concealment, esp. for purposes of subversion or deception; private or surreptitious: *Their clandestine meetings went undiscovered for two years.*” Clandestine. Dictionary.com. *Dictionary.com Unabridged* (v 1.1). Random House, Inc. <<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/clandestine>> (4 February 2008). Della Porta’s usage implies a movement or organization that has walled itself off from the larger society and, in many cases, from its parent movement.

³⁶ della Porta, 107.

³⁷ Ibid., 111 – 14.

³⁸ Ibid., 122. This is a particularly important insight because of the emphasis placed on ideology as the critical causal factor of Islamist terrorism. Della Porta’s analysis shows that ideology is a facilitator, not a causal factor, of terror.

³⁹ Ibid., 120 – 26.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 126 – 32.

⁴¹ An insurgency can be thought of as a potentially violent SMO that maintains terror as a method. The method is subordinate to the SMO’s political, economic, or social goals. For a terrorist group, terror is the logic.

⁴² della Porta, 132 – 38. James C. Scott makes a strong case that the interests of a radical elite and the population on whose behalf it claims to fight (peasants, workers, etc.) are inherently divergent. He believes that very few elite vanguard SMOs manage to successfully bridge the gap and, as a result, tend to pose control and become separated from the larger social movement. James C. Scott, “Revolution in the Revolution: Peasants and Commissars,” *Theory and Society* 7, Special Double Issue on State and Revolution (Jan – Mar 1979): 97 – 134.

⁴³ della Porta, 138 – 54.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 156.

⁴⁵ Lawson, 95.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 106 – 7.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 107.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 107. Hafez and Wiktorowicz, 67 – 8.

⁴⁹ Hafez and Wiktorowicz, 67 – 8.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 68.

⁵¹ Ibid., 71.

⁵² Seymour M. Lipset referred to in Angell, 107.

⁵³ In an earlier paper (Michael V. Samarov, *Islamist Totalitarian Operational Art: An Analysis of the Theories of Abu Musab al-Suri and Abu Bakr Naji*, Unpublished Manuscript, 2006), I argue that the political-strategic objectives of the Islamist totalitarians are to: (1) defeat the United States and its Western Allies; (2) to establish a totalitarian state (similar to the mid-Twentieth Century Soviet Union) within the territory representing the largest extent of Muslim expansion during the “Golden Age of Islam”; and (3) to subsequently conquer all remaining states and bring them under the control of this global caliphate.

⁵⁴ “Abu Musab al-Suri,” *Global Terror Alert*, Ed. Evan Kohlmann, 2005, <<http://www.globalterroralert.com/pdf/0705/abumusabalsuri.pdf>> (6 Sept 2006). Al-Suri is also known as Mustafa Setmariam Naser and Omar Abdel Hakim.

⁵⁵ Abu Musab al-Suri, *The Call to Global Islamic Resistance*, Arlington, Virginia: Centra Technology Inc., 2006, 685.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 687 – 8.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 688 – 9.

⁵⁸ Al-Suri, 691.

⁵⁹ Malise Ruthven (Malise Ruthven, *A Fury for God* (London: Granta Books, 2002), 68-71) traces the connection between Marxism-Leninism and Maududi. More directly, Maududi (Sayyid Abu ‘Ala Maududi, *The Process of Islamic Revolution: An Address Delivered at Muslim University, Aligarh, India*, 12 Sept 1940, <http://www.witness-pioneer.org/vil/Books/M_PIR/part1.htm> (26 May 2007)) argues that the Islamic state is fundamentally different from the modern nation state. He asserts that only those people who truly and completely follow God’s law would exist in the perfect Muslim society. Such citizens, having fully accepted (or been fully indoctrinated into) the Islamic belief system, would not be tempted by power, wealth, reputation, sex, or any other materialistic concern because their place before the immortal judgment of God would be far more important. Equality, tranquility, peace, and prosperity would be the natural order in this earthly Islamist paradise. The parallels to the Communist “end-of-history” state are obvious. Ruthven (84-5), among others, directly traces the intellectual influence of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Vladimir Lenin – and of *The Communist Manifesto* and *What is to be Done* – on Qutb’s *Ma’alim fi’l-tariq* (“Signposts Along the Road” or “Milestones”). “Milestones” explicitly calls for a vanguard party to lead the Islamic revolution (Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*, <http://www.youngmuslims.ca/online_library/books/milestones/Introduction.asp> (26 May 2007), introduction).

⁶⁰ Al-Suri, 692 – 3.

⁶¹ Ibid., 693 – 4.

⁶² Ibid., 694 – 7.

⁶³ Ibid., 698.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 698 – 708, 715 – 30. Al-Suri is at some pains to refute the popular claim that the United States had any significant role in the Afghan jihad, in supporting the Afghan Arabs, and in “creating” al-Qaeda.

⁶⁵ Al-Suri, 710 – 14. This syllogism continues to shape al-Qaeda actions from the political-strategic through the tactical levels. A clear example is the warning Ayman al-Zawahiri issued to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi when the latter’s operational and tactical actions in Iraq significantly deviated from the accepted logic. “English Translation of Ayman al Zawahiri’s letter to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi”, *The Daily Standard*, 12 Oct 2005, <<http://www.weeklystandard.com/Content/Public/Articles/000/000/006/203gpaul.asp>>, (6 Sept 2006).

⁶⁶ Al-Suri (730 – 5) believes that the September 11 attacks were a significant strategic mistake. He believes that the Jihadi Stream that grew between the 1960s and 1990s was all but destroyed in the US response to that attack. This disagreement is, however, with bin Laden’s method. Al-Suri completely agrees with the syllogism of America as the key target.

⁶⁷ Kennan. Of the five conclusions that Kennan makes at the end of the Long Telegram, the first (quoted in the Section I) is an assessment. The remaining four are the necessity that the US Government (1) educate the public as to the “realities of Russian [*sic*] situation,” (2) ensure the “health and vigor of our own society,” (3) “formulate and put forward for other nations a much more positive and constructive picture of sort of world [*sic*] we would like to see,” and (4) “have courage and self-confidence to cling to our own methods and conceptions of human society.” Taken together, these recommendations essentially inoculate the US, its allies, and the rest of the world from Soviet Communism – a “malignant parasite which feeds only on diseased tissue.”

⁶⁸ Hala Mustafa, “Nurturing Anti-Americanism in Egypt: Towards Revising US/Egyptian Relations,” *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*, April, 2006.

⁶⁹ Lipset (Angell, 107) argues that legitimacy and effectiveness are pre-requisites for a functioning democratic system.

⁷⁰ The orienting function of SMT is a direct link to John Boyd's theories of war. Boyd saw combat as a competitive cycle in which enemies were engaged in simultaneous or near-simultaneous iteration of Observing, Orienting, Deciding, and Acting. This is called the Boyd Cycle or OODA Loop. He believed that orienting was the most important and complex aspect of the OODA cycle. Boyd believed that the combatant that could cycle through the OODA Loop more rapidly than his enemy would win because the actions of the slower party become increasingly irrelevant the further behind it falls. He saw the moral effect on an adversary that knows that its actions are irrelevant and is unable to do anything to alter the situation as more important to achieving victory than the physical destruction of enemy forces. John Boyd, *Patterns of Conflict*, Dec 1986, <<http://www.d-n-i.net/boyd/pdf/poc.pdf>>, (17 Feb 2007).

⁷¹ Charles Tilly, "Forward," in Quintan Wiktorowicz, ed., *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), xi.

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